

My name is Sharon Nason and I'm a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor. I have two daughters and 6 grandchildren. Throughout the course of my daughters' education, they attended both public and private schools and one was home schooled for several years. Currently 3 of my grandchildren are in public schools and one is in a private school.

Both of my daughters are average students. They don't have any learning disabilities but neither did school come easy for them. Both learn information best with a kinesthetic or hands on approach. They benefit most from being able to see an immediate application for what they are learning. One of my daughters is fairly shy and quite introverted. For her large classrooms were very overwhelming and intimidating.

Because of these issues we started our girls in private schools. The classrooms were smaller in size and it was easier for the teachers to make the learning applications my daughters needed to assimilate information. Eventually, as they got into the higher grades, private education became cost prohibitive and we transitioned them into public schools. The public school setting was a challenge for both of them. We were living out of state at the time and in that location my oldest daughter was fortunate enough to be able to attend a cosmetology program at the community college her senior year of high school or she may not have graduated. We had to take our youngest daughter out of public school and home school her in order for her to graduate high school. I know the dropout rate here in Helena is currently about 20%. Both of my daughters could have easily become a part of those statistics if we as parents had not been on top of things and explored options we could make work for them. Our task could have been made much easier had there been more options available to us at the time but we made do with what we had.

I say all that to emphasize that had there been charter schools or scholarship tax credits or tuition tax credits, we would have had more options to explore to better accommodate the learning style of our daughters. I'm not here to speak against public schools. I attended public schools and excelled in that environment. What I am here to say is that for some children it is not an option

that works well for them for a variety of reasons. As I said earlier, we were at risk of having our daughters become a part of the dropout statistics had it not been for exploring some creative options to work with their learning style. Not every family has the ability to pursue the options we did. The legislation before you will expand the educational options parents can choose from in order to best fit the needs of their children.

democrat
I recently heard Joel Kline interviewed about the status of our current education system. He was the Chancellor for 8 ½ years of the largest school system in the U.S., that of New York City. In that interview he said, and I quote: "We're looking at a time when our country is massively under-educating our children and the 21st century won't be forgiving." He says we need more radical change and we need to create competition. He says, and again I quote: "If people have to earn their client base, the kids that go to those schools, they will compete." In that interview he pointed to Harlem as an example of the type of change charter schools can create. He said that in Harlem today 40% of kids who start school go to charter schools and nobody can take those kids for granted anymore. Parents in Harlem now have a choice for their children and that is all we are asking for here in Montana, an educational choice. With the United States ranking as low academically as it currently does on the international scene, especially in the areas of math and science, I do not believe we have the option any longer of being selective in the educational options we pursue if we are going to be academically competitive in the 21st century.

For that reason I urge you to support HB 603.